

Divorce

📖 Matthew 19:1-12

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Questions from Previous Lessons

Q: What's the difference between forgiving and tolerating sin?

A: Tolerating sin is overlooking it. Jesus is not teaching us to tolerate sin. Quite the opposite. He is teaching us to confront it. It is only to be forgiven when the sinning brother repents of the sin. Until that time some degree of separation is necessary.

Q: Do we forgive them of the same sin over and over?

A: I think if that's the case then we have to consider whether genuine repentance is taking place. One who genuinely repents has a change of mind that leads to a change of course in life. The focus of the passage is on those who genuinely repent. Those are the ones we forgive. I think Jesus' point of making such an extreme comparison is to say that we need to have an attitude of forgiveness. The Pharisees did not have an attitude of forgiveness. They put limits on forgiveness where God has put none.

Today's Lesson

Last week we finished the fourth narrative followed by discourse section in Matthew 13:53-19:1. This fourth section is called *The Withdrawal of the King* because the King had been rejected by the leadership and so He is withdrawing and preparing for His death and training His apostles for ministry during the interadvent age where the Church will form as a preparatory age for the kingdom to come. The discourse at the close of this section was prompted by the fact that Peter had taken on a more prominent role and the question was raised amongst themselves, "Who is to be the greatest in the kingdom. So the discourse is titled the *Discourse on Kingdom Greatness*. Three attitudes were highlighted as being necessary for greatness in the kingdom. First, an attitude of humility as a child. A child had no position or status in society and a humble disciple considers himself of no

status but rather servant of all. Second, an attitude of honesty in dealing with sin. He evaluates his own sin and the sin of others in light of the standard of God's word and confronts sin in order to maintain purity and harmony in the local church. Third, an attitude of forgiveness of fellow brothers and sisters in Christ when they repent of their sin. This is not toleration of sin but forgiveness when sin is repented of. If one develops the attitudes of humility, honesty and forgiveness he is on his way to being great in the kingdom to come.

Matt 19:1 is the end of this narrative-discourse and the next narrative-discourse begins in Matt 19:2 and ends in 25:46. This fifth section is called *The Formal Rejection of the King* because in the narrative of this section Matthew charts the increasing opposition of the leadership to Jesus as Jesus continues to train His disciples and prepare them for the events in Jerusalem. At the conclusion of this narrative Jesus gives His greatest eschatological discourse in Matt 24-25, *The Discourse on Kingdom Coming*. This discourse sketches the future conditions that one generation of Israel will face that will result in the Second Coming of the Son of Man in His kingdom as previewed at the Transfiguration. So the kingdom is still to come and Jesus is training His disciples for the Church age so they can prepare for that kingdom.

Today we come to the first pericope in Matt 19:1 and this one concerns divorce. It is probably just as divisive today as it was then because Christian culture today is much the same as Jewish culture then. Both cultures were extremely lax when it came to marriage and divorce. And we will try to tread these waters carefully because there are many difficulties, particularly when it comes to the exception clause of verse 9 and the definition of the immorality. Before we get there, notice in 19:1 the expression **When Jesus had finished these words**. This is the Greek expression that Matthew uses five times to divide narrative-discourse sections. He stated this expression previously in 7:28; 11:1, 13:53 and now 19:1. He will use it once more in 26:1. Here the point is that when He had finished this discourse in the Galilee at Capernaum in Peter's house **He departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan**.

I want you to note the movement toward Jerusalem and the cross since 16:21 when He first mentioned His impending death. The movement may be seen in four stages. First, from Caesarea Philippi in the far north. There He announced for the first time that He would be killed and raised on the third day. On this occasion Peter rebuked Him. Second, from Mt Hermon at the Transfiguration. There He announced that He would suffer and be raised. Peter, James and John did not seem to grasp the significance. Third, from the Galilee near Capernaum. There He announced that the Son of Man would be delivered into the hands of men, be killed and raised on the third day. The disciples were deeply grieved. Four, in 19:1 **He departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan**. The Lord is conscious of His mission and is moving toward Jerusalem and the cross. There is not much time left to prepare His disciples for the coming interadvent age. Therefore, as Schlegel says, "One cannot overstate both the excitement and tension that accompanied Jesus on his way to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. Every question, every word, was loaded..." The route Jesus took **from Galilee into the region of Judea beyond Jordan** was to walk through the southern end of the Valley of Jezreel, past Beth-

Shean, across the Jordan River and along the eastern side of the Jordan Rift Valley. On the east side of the Jordan the population was predominately Jewish and water was plentiful. On the west side the population was predominately Samaritan. As Walvoord noted "By taking this route, Christ avoided Samaria."¹

So He was now **beyond the Jordan**. This was the desert region where John had Baptized. It was under the control of Herod Antipas. And we see in 19:2 **large crowds followed Him**. The reason **large crowds** were in this area is because they were all going to Jerusalem for Passover. Passover was one of three annual feasts that all Jewish males were required to attend. So we have **large crowds** of people **following Him** and Matthew notes that **He healed them there**. We see our Lord's compassion even when that generation had rejected Him. Toussaint said, "Even as He journeys to Jerusalem to suffer and die, He manifests His royal benevolence in healing those who come to Him."² The parallel in Mark 10:2 adds that Jesus also taught them. Jesus' ministry was always characterized by teaching because He viewed the house of Israel as sheep and Himself as the Shepherd and the leadership had not been feeding the sheep and so they were malnourished and in need of extensive teaching to regain spiritual health. And so He both taught and healed them beyond the Jordan on the way to Jerusalem.

Matt 19:3 shows us that **Pharisees** were among the **large crowds** and **Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him**. The Greek word **testing** is *πειραζω* and means "to attempt to entrap through a process of inquiry."³ Toussaint said, "...the Pharisees approach Him with the malicious purpose of "tempting" (*πειραζω*) Him."⁴ Pentecost said, "The Pharisees had devised yet another trap to ensnare Christ and thus be able to accuse Him." They had already decided in 12:14 to destroy Him, the only matter was how to destroy Him. Schlegel says, "Some Pharisees thought they could diminish Jesus' popular following and get him in trouble with Herod Antipas by asking a question about divorce (Matt. 19:1-3; Mark 10:1-2)."⁵ So at the very least they thought they could alienate Him from the crowds and at the very most they could get Him in trouble with Herod Antipas. Antipas had been the one who arrested John the Baptizer because he was so outspoken in his opposition to his divorcing the daughter of King Aretas IV and marrying his brother-in-law's wife, Herodias. Jesus likely held to a similar view as John.

Now, Matt 19 is the most extensive report we have of Jesus' teachings on marriage and divorce, but it is not His first teaching on marriage and divorce. Turn to Matt 5:31. What I'm doing here is showing you that the Pharisees were not ignorant of Jesus' teachings on marriage and divorce. They already understood His views and wanted to get Him to publicize his views before a large crowd because His view was out of step with the popular theology of the day. They knew this would get Him in trouble. In Matt 5:21ff what Jesus is doing is contrasting what the people had been taught in the synagogues by the scribes and Pharisees with the true teaching and intent of the Law of Moses. To make this contrast He repeatedly says something like, "You have heard it said...but I say to you." In verse 31, here is what was said in the synagogue, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE.' Now this was a loose quote from Deut 24:1 and it's the same passage the

Pharisees will quote in Matt 19:7. And you will say, well what's wrong with it? It's a quote from the OT. Well, not actually. Actually it's a summary. And it was shorthand for their interpretation of the passage. The debate was over what is said in the Law of Moses where it says, "if a woman finds no favor in her husband's eyes because he has found some indecency in her." What is the indecency? And if indecency is found in her then alright, you could give her a certificate of divorce. So what was the "indecency." There were two schools of thought. The school of Shammai and the school of Hillel. These were two rabbis and rabbi Shammai put forth the opinion of the strict school. He said that the indecency was unfaithfulness and so the only basis for divorce was marital unfaithfulness as interpreted in their oral law. The other rabbi was Hillel and he put forth the opinion of the lax school. He said the indecency was anything the woman does at all that is displeasing to the husband, or as the Pharisees put it in Matt 19:3, "any cause at all." And guess which school had won the day? The school of Hillel. A man could divorce a woman for virtually any possible reason and a woman could never divorce a man for any reason. Shepard says, "They took the words....in Deuteronomy, in the widest possible sense: if "she found no favour in his eyes," or "he found another woman more attractive"—which sounds modern enough—he could put her away. Many specific offenses were enumerated, such as going in public with uncovered head, entering into conversation with other men, speaking disrespectfully of the husband's parents in his presence, burning the bread, being quarrelsome or troublesome, getting a bad reputation or being childless (for ten years)." Now obviously, from the context here in Matt 5:32, did Jesus agree with the school of Hillel? Did Jesus agree that a man could put his wife away for any cause at all? No. Emphatically no. He says in 5:32, "but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." So what is Jesus doing? He's defining the "indecency" in Deut 24:1 as one thing, "unchastity." It's not anything at all, it's only one thing, "unchastity." We're not going to define this word now because it's the same word used in 19:9, except to say for the time being that this was the only valid basis for divorce under the Law of Moses. And so what Jesus was saying by the final phrases, about making her commit adultery; and the man who marries her is also committing adultery, is that the divorces you are getting are invalid because they are not on the basis of "unchastity," they are on the basis of burning your toast or some other trivial thing, and therefore the certificate of divorce is invalid and so she is still married under the Law and therefore when she marries, which is a foregone conclusion in that culture, she had no choice, she had no financial support, so when she remarries she is committing adultery as is the man who marries her. He would be marrying a married woman which is adultery. We could go on and on but suffice it to say the Deuteronomic code goes on to say that once she has married another man she can never go back to her original husband and the intent seems to be to restrain sin. They could divorce, on the basis of unchastity, but if they did and they remarried someone else then they could never go back to their first wife. It was to restrain sinful tendencies, to regulate the negative effects of sin. And some think it was to head off a form of wife-swapping that was actually popular among some rabbis at the time of Christ. They would go to another town and take a wife from that town while they were there and then go back to their wife in their hometown. That is a very wicked thing, the heart of man is desperately wicked and one of the purposes of the Law was to reveal to unbelieving Jews that they were

sinners, not to be creatively interpreted to make room for sin. So you already have this background teaching to Matt 19 in Matt 5. The Pharisees knew what Jesus taught and they knew that the people would get all bent out of shape if He made it public because the divorce rate was high, most of the people in the audience had been divorced and remarried. But I want you to notice something. Jesus is going to use this situation as an opportunity to train His disciples for their ministry during the Church age. So there are parts of the passage that are relevant for the current age, and of course, the Law of Moses, that we're not under, but the other parts we are under. This was to help them maximize their ministries.

So we go back to Matt 19:3 and look at the Pharisees question. This is coming right out of the leading interpretation of Deut 24. **Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?** What school said this? The school of Hillel said this. This was the popular view. This was in vogue. This was taught and practiced in every synagogue. They are asking, do you agree that this is the meaning of the Law? Now how is Jesus going to handle this? Well, He's going to take it back to creation. This is something new. He had not done this before, as far as we know. So in 19:4, **He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let no man separate."** Now, Jesus didn't even mention the Law of Moses. What He did was go all the way back to **the beginning**. And what Jesus is reading out of the Genesis text is not easy to see at first. You have to really think about this. He's not arguing from marriage as a covenant. This is a common way evangelicals argue for marriage; they go to marriage as a covenant. I've done that. Marriage is a covenant. But Jesus is going farther than that. He's arguing that marriage is a creative work of God. And if you don't catch that marriage is a creative act of God you won't see the seriousness of divorce. Think about what He is pulling out of the Genesis narrative. God created the one man Adam and then what did He do? He made Eve out of his bone and flesh. Then what did He do? He put them back together again so that the two are one flesh. Carson said, "... the 'one flesh' in every marriage between a man and a woman is a reenactment of and testimony to the very structure of humanity as God created it."⁶ In other words, what happens when a man and woman marry is a creative work of God. Constable said, "God has united them in a "one flesh" relationship by an act of creation. Since God has done this, separating them with divorce is not only unnatural but rebellion against God. Essentially Jesus allied Himself with the prophet Malachi rather than with any of the rabbis. Malachi had revealed that God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16)."⁷ And so He does. So His reasoning is based on how God created male and female and not just on a covenant relationship between a husband and wife. Therefore, while the parent-child relationship can be severed the marriage relationship cannot be. If one partner breaks the covenant the marriage is not ended. That is critical to grasp. Instead the marriage relationship continues regardless of marital unfaithfulness to the covenant. And because of that it is especially egregious for a man to divorce his wife. Paul agreed in 1 Cor 7:11, "...the husband should not divorce his wife." So Jesus' view seems to tread new

ground in the debate between Hillel and Shammai since neither school held this view. This is a very high view of marriage that brings permanency of the marriage to a whole new level.

In 19:7 the Pharisees are granting Jesus' view and asking Him that if that is so, how does that fit with the Law of Moses. **They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY?"** This, of course, was their summary interpretation of Deut 24:1-4. It meant that Moses commanded the man to write a certificate of divorce to his wife if she did anything that might displease him, whether burning his toast or not being as pretty as another woman, which was an erroneous interpretation of the Law and did not fit with the purpose of the Law which was to reveal sin, not provide occasion for it.

In 19:8 Jesus is now going to comment on the law. He said to them, **"Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way."** Note that Jesus does not grant the truthfulness of their statement in 19:7 that **Moses commanded** them to get a divorce. Instead **Moses** only **permitted** it. What they had done was turned the Law into an occasion for sin when the purpose of the Law was to reveal sin. They had turned the Law of Moses on its head. And even when divorce was valid it arose out of the hardness of their hearts and the Law put restraints on marriage after that so that sin would not run amuck and defile the land. And so the purpose of the Law was to reveal to them that they were sinners in need of righteousness, not to provide an occasion for sin. Constable says, "It is saying that the divorce option that God granted the Israelites testifies to man's sinfulness. Therefore, one should always view divorce as evidence of sin, specifically hardness of heart. He or she should never view it as simply a morally neutral option that God granted, the correctness or incorrectness of which depended on the definition of the indecency. The Pharisees' fundamental attitude toward the issue was wrong. They were looking for grounds for divorce. Jesus was stressing the inviolability of the marriage relationship."⁸ As He says Himself at the end of verse 8, **from the beginning it has not been this way.** Therefore, if one is looking for grounds for divorce it is evidence of hardness of heart; that one is wanting to undo the creative work of God. That is a sin problem.

We come to 19:9 and Jesus says, **And I say to you.** The words **I say to you** stress His authority. His view was the authority because He is the one who gave the Law on Mt Sinai. What He is doing here is giving the authoritative interpretation of the Law, and in particular, what the indecency was in Deut 24:1 that was the only valid basis for divorce under the Law. **I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.** Now that's the same statement as Matt 5:32, so Jesus is authoritatively interpreting the Law. He is telling us with this word **immorality** what the indecency was. And we are sure to note that the statement in Matthew only allows for one-way divorce, a husband divorcing his wife, whereas the parallel in Mark 10:12 presents two-way divorce saying, "and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery." So why the difference? The reason Matthew only presents one-way divorce is because it was written to Jews and in Jewish culture only men could divorce their wives. But Mark is writing to a

Gentile audience and in Gentile culture divorces could work two-ways and so he records that a wife could divorce her husband. So there are these slight differences and we are accounting for these differences.

Now to the 'exception clause.' This is one of the debates. Some debate whether it even is an exception grammatically and others debate what exact clause is the exception. Suffice it to say that the grammatical expression *μη επι* always introduces an exception in the NT (e.g. 1 Tim 5:19) and the **immorality** is the only valid exception.

This word translated **immorality** in the NASB is another debate. The NIV translates "sexual immorality" and the KJV translates "fornication." The word itself is *πορνεια*. It has a range of meaning depending on the context. The first meaning is "unlawful sexual intercourse, *prostitution, unchastity, fornication.*" The second meaning is "participation in prohibited degrees of marriage, *fornication,*" referring to close of kin marriages or incest. The third meaning is "immorality of a transcendent nature, *fornication,*" referring by imagery to false worship or spiritual adultery. All three of these meanings have been used to try and explain what Jesus meant. There are four basic views. First, *πορνεια* is adultery. This is the view of Toussaint who says, "He speaks authoritatively of the true meaning of the Old Testament asserting that there is to be no divorce except for adultery."⁹ However, this view suffers two problems. One, the normal word for "adultery" is *μοιχεια*, not *πορνεια*. The two words were used by Matthew previously in 15:19 back to back, clearly showing they are different. Two, "adultery" is defined in this verse as occurring when the man marries another woman and not before. To be clear, adultery does not occur when a married man or woman has sex with another person; that is fornication. Adultery is different, it occurs when a married man or woman divorces on an illegitimate basis and then marries another. It's the second marriage that is the adultery because the first marriage still stands. Since adultery is something different then it is not the *πορνεια*. Second, *πορνεια* refers to incest, too close of kin being married. The Law forbade such marriages. Some think the prohibition in Acts 15:20, 29 that Gentiles keep themselves from fornication supports this view. While Gentiles did sometimes marry closer than the Law of Moses permitted there is no record of Jews under the Law engaging in such close marriages. Therefore, the view that *πορνεια* refers to incest is not satisfactory. Third, *πορνεια* is pre-marital sex discovered during the betrothal period. This view particularly relates to Jewish marriage customs and explains why Mark did not include the exception clause. This is the view of Pentecost who says, "...the only possibility of divorce allowed by Christ was a cancellation of a marriage contract during the Jewish betrothal period before the marriage had been completed."¹⁰ The Jews had a betrothal period of one year for the very purpose of making sure the girl was a virgin. Moral standards were lax at the time. Pentecost gives the example of Joseph who discovered that Mary was with child during the betrothal period and sought a divorce. While it is true that a Jewish man and woman were considered husband and wife during the betrothal period and that a divorce would have to be sought to annul it, they were really not married. Two, in the Deut 24 passage the husband and wife were living together. This could not refer to the betrothal period in Jewish marriage customs since the couple lived separate during this time. Therefore, the view that Jesus only permitted divorce during the Jewish betrothal period is unsatisfactory. Fourth, *πορνεια* refers to a broad range of

sexual sins that lie outside of God's will. This is the first and most common usage of the word. When the most common sense makes sense no other sense should be sought. These sexual sins would include fornication, homosexuality, bestiality, premarital sex, incest, et. al. Probably the best translation would be "except sexual immorality" or "except fornication." One problem with this view is why did only Matthew record the exception clause as he did in both Matt 5:32 and 19:9, whereas Mark in the parallel did not mention the exception. A possible answer to this problem is that Matthew is writing to Jews and defining the meaning of Moses' expression "some indecency" in Deut 24:1, a matter which would not be familiar to a Gentile audience as with Mark.

In my thinking the fourth view is the truest to the text. The only valid basis under the Law of Moses for divorce was some gross sexual sin. But no matter which view one takes, divorce was not the way it was from the beginning and the presence of divorce and remarriage is an evidence of sin and in particular hardness of heart. The bigger picture is that when two people come together in marriage it is a creative work of God. The two become one flesh reminiscent of the original creation of the one man Adam who contained Eve. Now at this point Matthew does not record the Pharisees response because, again, Jesus was using the occasion to teach His disciples about marriage in the coming Church age. And the lesson is clear, if you take a wife in the coming Church age, you shouldn't divorce and remarry because it will detract from your ministry.

Now the disciples understood because in 19:10, **The disciples said to Him, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry."** If there is virtually no way out except gross immorality, why even enter into it? Now Paul in 1 Cor 7 reiterated that while neither marrying or not marrying is sinful, those who do not marry have an advantage over those who do. In 7:27, "Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you...I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord." So the bottom line is that last expression, Paul wants to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord. And in that sense one who remains unmarried has the greater advantage. He doesn't have all these other things in marriage to deal with. And the disciples are saying, well, marriage is going to have its difficulties and if you cannot get out by divorce except she commit some gross sexual sin, then you're stuck and you're going to have to work through those difficulties and we don't want to do that so they conclude, **it is better not to marry.**

Now this was an interesting view. As you can see from the disciple's response, it was neither the view of Hillel or the view of Shammai. If it had been one of their views they would not have come to this conclusion. Even the school of Shammai, the stricter school, permitted remarriage after a valid divorce. But Jesus took it all the way back to creation and the permanency of marriage from the standpoint of the creative work of God in joining the two into one flesh. In that scenario divorce and remarriage is not really an option unless one has a hardened heart. This was not a healthy prospect to the disciples. Therefore, they concluded, **it is better not to marry** in the first place.

In 19:11 Jesus said, **Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given.** By **this statement** Jesus is referring to the statement **better not to marry**. Only some men can accept that. As an aside it should be noted that while marriage is a divine institution this does not mean that every individual is to marry. A divine institution is for the entire human race, not for every individual of the human race. Jesus lists three groups of individuals who do not marry. First, **there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb**. These are men who are born impotent or without sexual desire. For them marriage is not an interest. Of course it is better for them not to marry since it would be a real drag for the wife. Second, **there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men**. These are men who typically served in positions of royal government and had close contact with the King's harem. To avoid any sexual contact these men were castrated. Third, **there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven**. These are men who have decided not to marry so that their interests are not divided and they can give their full attention to issues related to **the kingdom of heaven**. As Paul said in 1 Cor 7, one who is unmarried does not have his interests divided but can give his full devotion to the Lord.

Finally, Jesus says, **He who is able to accept this, let him accept it.** It's a fact that not all people can accept it, only those in verse 11, **to whom it has been given**. Those who cannot accept it should marry and those who can accept it should not marry. Now to be clear this does not mean that those who are celibate are more holy than those who marry. Paul said to marry is not sinful. It just means that God has a different plan for individual people's lives. But it does mean that the one who is celibate can give his full devotion to the Lord, whereas one who is married has divided interests.

The bottom line is that Jesus held a very high view of marriage. Constable says, "When a man and a woman marry, God creates a union that is as strong as the union that bound Adam and Eve together before God separated Eve from Adam. Man should not separate what God has united. However, even though God hates divorce He permits it in cases where gross sexual indecency (fornication) has entered the marriage."¹¹ It is important to note that He does not demand it and that if hearts are softened and repentance is genuine then restoration and continuation of the marriage is preferred, even where gross sexual sin has occurred.

In summary, in 19:1 Jesus takes another conscious move toward Jerusalem and the cross. He departed from Galilee south through the Valley of Jezreel past Beth-Shean and across the Jordan River and down the Jordan Rift

Valley to the region beyond Jordan. In 19:2 there were large crowds following Him as they were all on their way in caravans to Jerusalem for the Passover. Mark says He was teaching them and Matthew that He healed them. Along the way 19:3 says some Pharisees came to test Him as to whether he held to the school of Hillel's interpretation of Deut 24:1 that a man may divorce his wife for any reason at all. They knew that he did not agree with this interpretation of the Law and that His answer would at the least alienate him from the people and at the most raise the ire of Herod Antipas to arrest, imprison and execute him. This would solve all of the Pharisees problems. In 19:4, rather than turn to the Law He went to creation and asked if they had read the part about where God made them male and female and in a creative act rejoined them as one flesh? The implications were clear; marriage is a permanent union. Granting this, in 19:7 the Pharisees ask how He could reconcile this with Moses command to give the wife a certificate of divorce and send her away. The simple answer, in 19:8, is that this was to reveal their hardness of heart and to be sure Moses did not command it but he only permitted it, but even then from the beginning it has not been this way. In 19:9, Jesus accords to Himself full authority in interpreting the Law saying, "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except on the grounds of some gross sexual sin, and marries another woman commits adultery." In 19:10 the disciples understood Jesus to be saying that marriage is pretty much permanent and therefore it is better not to marry. To marry is to invite problems into your life and to commit yourself to solving those problems together. Their conclusion was correct but in 19:11 Jesus said to them, "Not all men can accept this." In 19:12 only three groups can accept this; eunuchs from birth since they are impotent or have no sexual desire, eunuchs who are castrated since they are prohibited from marrying and eunuchs who decide for themselves not to marry so they can devote their total interest to the things of the kingdom of heaven.

By application what can we learn? First, for a Christian the issue in divorce is not what does a law say but who am I? When you married your spouse God engaged in a creative act of making the two of you one flesh. God has done that; we are not to undo that. It is rebellion against God Second, divorce occurs because of sin. It is not one person's sin versus the other person's sin. Both have sinned. It is a sign of hardness of heart. Third, the only reason the Law permitted divorce was to reveal this hardness of heart. The Pharisees used it to authorize their right to get divorces. This was nothing more than rationalizing a sin pattern to satisfy their lusts. Fourth, there was only one valid basis under the Law for one to divorce, that was gross sexual sin. There was no other valid basis one could appeal to. And yet, from the beginning it was not that way. The design of marriage was that it be permanent. Fifth, divorce and remarriage both detract from the effectiveness of our life and ministry. This is the unavoidable consequence that Jesus is warning against in the context. Sixth, that marriage is a divine institution means that it was given for the human race, not that every individual must marry. For those who do not marry they have the advantage of not having their interests divided. They can give their full attention to the things of the Lord. The bottom line is not "Can I divorce?" or "What reasons can I get a divorce for" or "Now that I am divorced, can I get remarried?" but the real question is, "How can I minister most effectively in preparation for

the kingdom?" This is really the only issue and the only right question. All the other questions are manifestations of hardness of heart.

¹ John Walvoord, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p 141.

² Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 19:1.

³ BDAG, p 793.

⁴ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 223.

⁵ William Schlegel, *Satellite Bible Atlas*, 9-8.

⁶ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 19:4.

⁷ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 19:4.

⁸ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 19:8.

⁹ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 225.

¹⁰ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 358.

¹¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 19:10.